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USIB-D-16.2/19
19 August 1959

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

Validity Study of

SNIE 100-9-58, SNIE 100-11-58 and SNIE 100-12-58

All Regarding Developments in the Taiwan Strait Area

The attached validity study of SNIE 100-9-58, SNIE 100-11-58
and SNIE 100-12-58 was noted by the Intelligence Board on
18 August 1959 (USIB-M-58, item 6).



Executive Secretary

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Attachment

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Validity Study of

SNIE 100-9-58, SNIE 100-11-58 and SNIE 100-12-58

All Regarding Developments in the Taiwan Strait Area

1. Three special estimates on the Taiwan Strait situation were produced in the three month period of August-October 1958. On the basis of subsequent developments, SNIEs 100-9-58 and 100-12-58 appear to have been remarkably sound and accurate. The least satisfactory of the three was 100-11-58, written in the midst of the crisis.

2. The three estimates generally agree (and it is still our estimate) that the Chinese Communist motives in initiating the crisis, were essentially political - i. e., that the military pressure on the offshore islands was a probing action designed to create trouble in US-GRC relations, demoralize the Nationalists, discredit the US, attract international support for the Communist position, and check any drift in world opinion toward a "two-Chinas" solution.

3. SNIE 100-9-58 (26 August 1958). This estimate, written largely before the heavy shelling of 23 August 1958, has proved to have been quite sound. Despite the passage of time, we feel its treatment of Chinese Communist motives and intentions still valid. We also feel it correctly gauged the risks the Chinese Communists were prepared to run. Paragraph three stated that "Communist China will probably continue to exert military pressures against the Chinmen and Matsu groups, seeking to avoid a clear point of military showdown. Depending on US reactions, these pressures could include intensive and sustained artillery harassment of Chinmen, aggressive air and naval action in the Strait area, provocative overflights of Taiwan, seizure of lightly-defended offshore islands, and a serious effort to interdict supply of the Chinmens and Matsus." Paragraph five stated that "if the US gave an explicit guarantee or committed its forces to the defense of the major offshore islands, the Chinese Communists would probably not attempt to seize those islands or interdict their supply."

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4. SNIE 100-11-58 (16 September 1958). This paper was written during the height of the crisis and included two important estimates which proved to be invalid. It estimated that it was unlikely that the Chinese Communists would gradually call off the interdiction of the Chinmens (paragraph 5) and that, short of surrendering Chinmen, the choices of action available to the US to break the interdiction "eventually would probably involve US attacks on the mainland." (paragraph one)

5. These judgments reflected misleading and incorrect information concerning the supply situation on the Chinmens, the levels of resupply necessary to maintain an effective defense force there, and the prospects for meeting those resupply requirements without attacking the Chinese Communist artillery positions on the mainland. The supply and resupply picture took on a quite different perspective about two weeks after the estimate was published.

6. Our incorrect judgments also reflected a general overestimation of the degree of risk the Chinese Communists were willing to run in maintaining their interdiction effort. When the US response indicated a US willingness to commit air and naval forces to support the Nationalist resupply effort, Peiping allowed the crisis generally to taper off. They backed away from the prospect of war at a lower point on a scale of ascending risk than we anticipated.

7. SNIE 100-12-58 (28 October 1958) was prepared after the Chinese Communists, in the face of US support of the defense of the islands, had reduced their military effort in the Quemoy area. Developments since then have tended to confirm the conclusions offered in this estimate. With a very little updating, it would be appropriate for publication today.

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